



An Chartlann Náisiúnta
National Archives

Appraisal Policy Statement

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1. Introduction

Appraisal is the process used to identify records of continuing evidential and historical value. This process ensures only records worthy of permanent preservation as archives are retained, and records whose business function has ceased are disposed of in a timely and structured manner. Appraisal helps to preserve the State's documentary heritage and protect the rights of citizens by safeguarding archives and making them available for public consultation.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this statement is to provide guidance to civil servants and bodies subject to the National Archives Act to develop a consistent and transparent approach to appraisal of departmental records and to support the informed assessment of these records.

3. Role of the National Archives

Section 7 of the National Archives Act, 1986 (the Act) grants power to the Director of the National Archives to authorise disposal of departmental records that are not worthy of permanent preservation as archives:

(3) An authorisation under this section-

- a. shall authorise the disposal of Departmental records to which it relates,*
- b. may specify conditions relating to such disposal, and*
- c. shall have effect in accordance with its terms and any conditions so specified.*

4. Scope

This policy statement applies to departmental records as defined in section 2(2) of the National Archives Act, 1986 and to all bodies subject to the Act. It may also be used as guidance for bodies that currently fall outside the scope of the Act.

5. Appraisal Guidelines

5.1 Value of Records

The primary function for which records are created for administrative, legal or fiscal purposes can be described as the primary value. The archival value of a record derives from its primary value, or business function. The use of the primary value as a method to appraise archival value will reduce the subjectivity of decisions on whether to retain or dispose of records. For example, the primary value of census records is to establish the population of the State in order to help plan public services. The genealogy and social research value is secondary.

5.2 Archival Records

The following categories of records have been identified by the National Archives as being worthy of permanent preservation as archives and should be transferred to the National Archives in accordance with section 8 of the Act:

- Records documenting the rights of citizens
- Records documenting core functions of state organisations
- Records documenting evidential and legal processes
- Records documenting the national experience

5.3 Non-Archival Records

Only a small percentage of records created by a Department of State are worthy of permanent preservation. Routine processing records or records created to support administrative practices do not generally warrant retention beyond business use. The National Archives has developed a retention schedule for generic classes of records as guidance on what records should be retained.

5.4 General Guidelines

Appraisal of records considers:

How significant is the source and context of the records?

Why were the records created and what function do they support? Do the records complement existing holdings in the National Archives, or supplement records created across various departments and agencies?

Is the information unique?

Is the information available in other public sources? Are the records to be appraised the only, or most complete, source of significant information? Records that contain information not available in other sources are more likely to warrant permanent preservation.

Do the records document decisions that set precedents?

Have the records been created as part of a decision-making process, or do they contain information related to policy development and implementation? The context within which records are created and used, including the statutory functions they support, will provide significant insight into their potential archival value. Policy and evidential processes are more likely to result in the creation of a higher number of archival records than processing or routine administration records.

5.5 Next Steps

Please contact the National Archives for further advice and guidance on the transfer and disposal of records at query@nationalarchives.ie.

Transfer:

All Departments of State are responsible for preparing their records for transfer to the National Archives. There are specific procedures and accompanying documentation for transferring records to the National Archives. We offer record transfer training to assist in the preparation of records for transfer and it is obligatory to attend.

Disposal:

The disposal process for compliance with the National Archives Act includes the completion of an appraisal request form and a survey by National Archives staff if required.

6. Related Material

[National Archives: Responsibilities under Legislation](#)

[National Archives: Disposal of Departmental Records](#)

[National Archives: Retention Schedule for Administrative Records](#)

[National Archives: Transfer of Records](#)

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